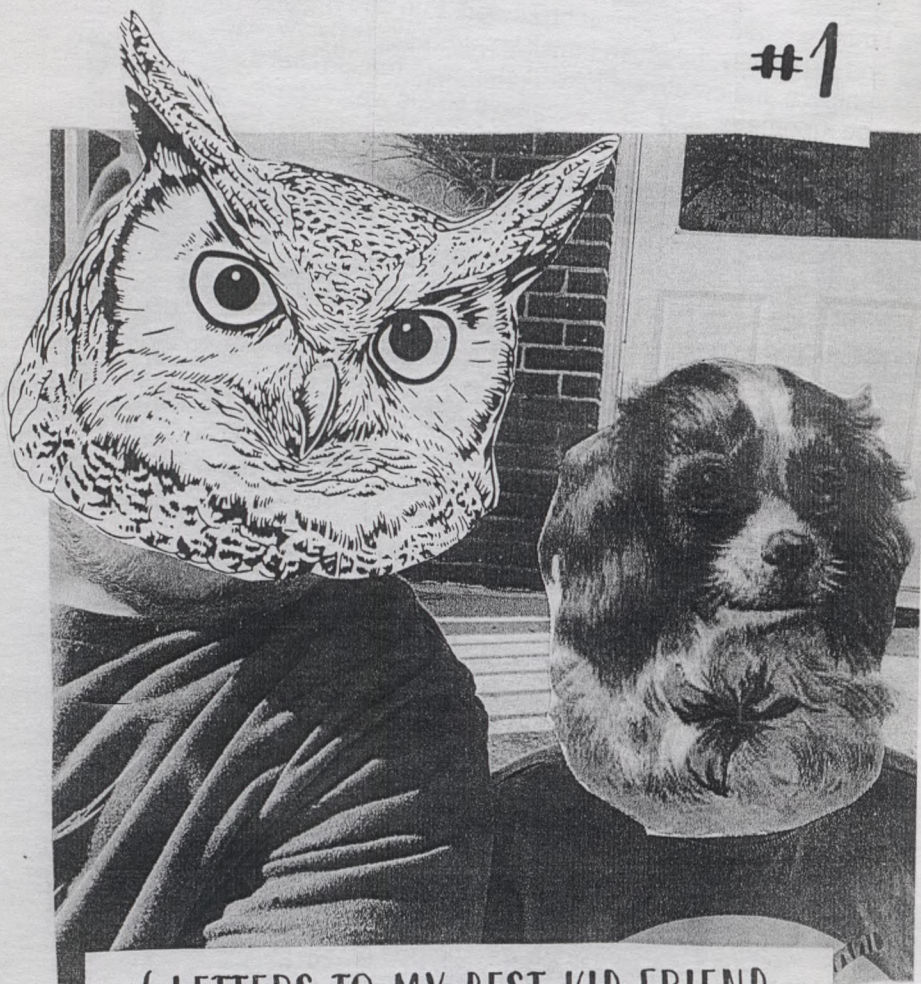


BEST KID FRIEND

#1



(LETTERS TO MY BEST KID FRIEND
ABOUT LIFE, HUMANITY, AND VIDEO
GAMES)

Dear Kristen.

I think we had fairly similar childhood. Fun and messy and full of play, because I think we are both fairly sensitive and creative adults. It stands to reason that if age, geometry, and socioeconomic status wasn't an issue, we would have been friends.

I think you know a lot about my past from reading or from my wife, your BFF. None of it is especially secret, or anything. Mostly I just don't talk about it because it isn't very interesting. These days, I'm trying not to engage with things that bore me.

I never really imagined a future in which I had kids. Even when I was a teenager and parenthood started picking off the girls at my high school. Or who couldn't see any other way out. Or who just accepted the fact of it and did their best. I hope they have all found some happiness and peace. I have to imagine things were rocky there at the beginning.

I had talked about parenting with various partners. But as I got older and older, it seemed like a less likely prospect. And honestly, parenthood is kind of like working for a small, shrill manager who gives you poop and vomit instead of money or medical insurance.

Andrew, like me, was a pioneer in the world of existing in the world. I was the first grandchild. My mom was sixteen when she had me and my grandfather didn't speak to her for months when he found out she was pregnant. She was the smart one, the one at whose feet he laid all of his hopes for his children. When he saw me, he broke his silence to tersely say that I was the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen. And then they worked their way back to one another, sort of.

Andrew was also a first grandchild, but also the first kid in your friend group. He was the turning point at which we all started growing up. I didn't know it then, but I should have seen it. John became a capital-d Dad after that. He wasn't perfect and he was def behind on the learning curve, but I think he did his best to keep up and grow into a better husband and human. He's certainly one of my favorites, and the first person I think of when I imagine a solid dude.

Andrew was the first kid I ever got to watch grow up, joyfully, in a house that shifted like a turntable to make the world a more comfortable landing place. Of course, I loved him right away.

But I didn't recognize that he would be my best kid friend until you held Penny when she was born and he was bereft and we ate graham crackers in the floor until he chilled out, and then maybe even had a little fun while we were running full force down the hallway on our way out.

When Brandon was born, I read BJ Novac's the Book with No Pictures to him. It's one of my favorites, but I think it can be a hard sell for a kid. But he leaned in and

loved it. Ryan took a picture of the two of us that still makes me happy to look at, even though it was pre-transition.

2

And then you let me babysit him and we were BOTH nervous because we knew what a sensitive kid he was. But I tried to put myself in his shoes and just did what made the most logical sense. We just played. We played Run & Scream which was just basically the two of us running unhinged around the house and yelling all our feelings and frustrations out and collapsing into a pile of giggles. I think your neighbors probably did not love Run & Scream because it was very loud. You might have liked it because the running and the screaming probably helped us both fall asleep easily.

You texted me after a babysitting hangout once, and said Andrew called me his best friend and I was so touched that I cried a little bit about it. And I felt weirdly seen as someone who was maybe a little kid wearing a big kid suit, trying to fit in.

Andrew was one of the first people to just roll with my transition, too. He didn't care about the sum or my parts or what to call me. He mostly cared about my ability to recognize Paw Patrol characters and blow bubbles. And honestly, same.

I know that you and Ry are deeply amused by our friendship, and that you sometimes think of it as an act of kindness on my part. But honesty, this is as deep and rewarding of a friendship as I have with any of my adult friends.

My favorite friends are smart, kind people who teach me things about how to navigate the world. My best friends make me a better person because I want to fill the inherent trust they place in my competency and morality.

I don't need to tell you, of all people, what a great kid he is. How, in spite of having big feelings he doesn't yet have the context for, he's smart and funny and he values fair play and honesty in a way a lot of grown-ups could take a lesson from. More than that, he reminds me that it's okay to turn off the boring productivity part of my brain and just play, for the fun of it.

This is just to say: thank you so much for he and Brandon. You and John are such good people, raising such cool, interesting little people. Thanks for the small window I get into parenthood, and for all of the times it's hard and heartbreaking and you go on even though it sucks.

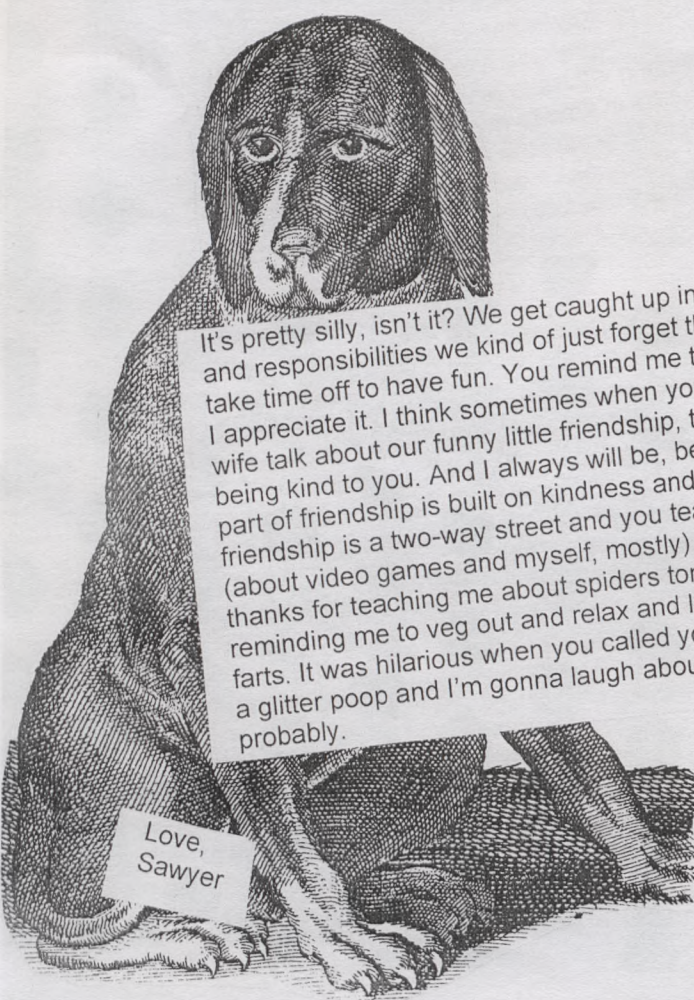
Thanks for the time I get to spend with my best kid friend and all the ways it makes me a more interesting writer and a kinder human. I've been thinking a lot lately what I look like from Andrew's perspective, and what I could say to him that might help him navigate the world. So, I've been writing letters to him I wish I could hurl back thirty-odd years in time to my kid self. I hope they help him. I'm going to collect these and put them into a zine or an essay or a book or something. I know he won't read them for a while, and that's okay. They're not really meant for now.

But this letter, and the ones I'm writing to your son, are a promise to do my best. I love him and you and John and Brandon very much. I'm grateful to you and for you-all.

Respectfully,
Sawyer.

Dear Andrew,

Thanks for playing spider with me on Roblox. It was super fun to do something without planning just because. I feel like grown-ups, myself included, spend a lot of time making plans, complaining about them and either canceling them or talking about how much they dread them.

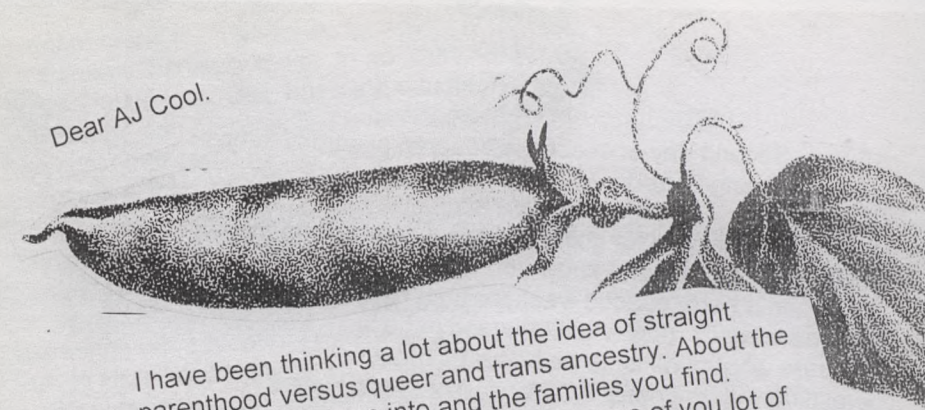


It's pretty silly, isn't it? We get caught up in schedules and responsibilities we kind of just forget that it's okay to take time off to have fun. You remind me to do that, and I appreciate it. I think sometimes when your mom or my wife talk about our funny little friendship, they think I'm being kind to you. And I always will be, because every part of friendship is built on kindness and honesty. But friendship is a two-way street and you teach me stuff (about video games and myself, mostly) all the time. So, thanks for teaching me about spiders tonight and for reminding me to veg out and relax and laugh about dog farts. It was hilarious when you called your cupcake filter a glitter poop and I'm gonna laugh about that all week probably.

Love,
Sawyer

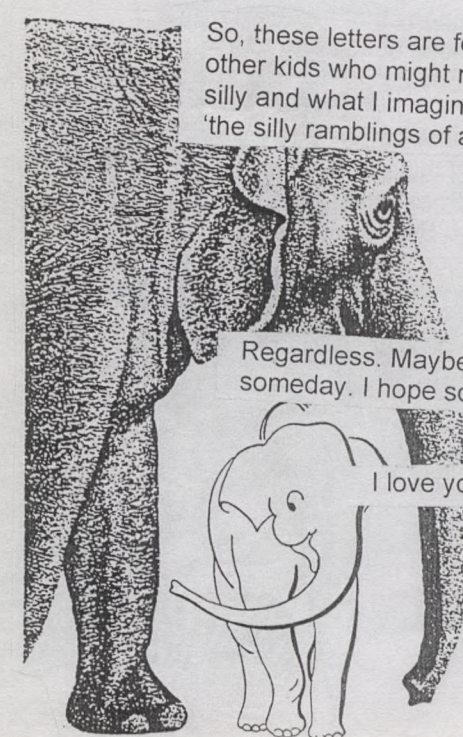
5

Dear AJ Cool.



I have been thinking a lot about the idea of straight parenthood versus queer and trans ancestry. About the families we are born into and the families you find. Maybe you'll be gay (if not you, surely one of you lot of

Ryan's college friends' kids will be) and I'm so glad that you have parent who will love and support you. And you'll know queer people, firsthand, as positive, (reasonably) well-adjusted role-models. Not everyone does. I didn't, in the end. But sometimes you must set off on a hero's journey to find a space you can fit comfortably into. And then you'll meet the well-adjusted role-models who teach you to be yourself. (One is a much curvier road, but I promise they end up in the same spot eventually.)



So, these letters are for you. Just in case. And they're for other kids who might need them. Maybe this is all quite silly and what I imagine to be 'valuable wisdom,' is in fact 'the silly ramblings of an senseless old man.'

Regardless. Maybe something in here will be useful someday. I hope so.

I love you and I always will no matter what.

Your friend,
Sawyer

6

Hey dude!

Second day of second grade and everyday keeps getting better!

I'm so proud of you for going to school and making the best of it even though I know you were nervous. This has been a hard, chaotic week for both Ryan and me. Her job is really rough right now and mine is ... well. I'm not sure what mine is, to be honest. I have been wrestling with imposter syndrome more than I knew I realized. I still am, a little. But I hope maybe I am getting my sea legs under me.

I do have things to say, and it sounds ridiculous to realize at age 42 that I'm pretty smart and usually have something to add to a subject or discussion that helps reframe it for someone else.

I had been giving some thought to applying for this PhD program at UPenn. And who knows, maybe someday I will. But I needed to walk around with the idea in my head for a couple of weeks, and what I have sort of come to is this:

I can make up a list of valid and salient reasons for applying. But the biggest one is that my mom was a narcissistic drug addict whose abuse and neglect make spite my most powerful motivator.

I've done some good stuff powered by spite. But lately, I feel like I've been hustling for the next thing for a little while. The next accomplishment. The next arbitrary marker of success to check off my list. But here's the rub: I don't know what that is. I have constantly felt like I was looking for something and tried to use logical sense and the opportunities that were available to me to make a good choice. And there have been moments of happiness and accomplishment. But there has not often been the chest-bursting sort of joy I have had lately. Graduating from college, winning an award for my thesis, landing an agent, all of those things that should have been things to celebrate made me really anxious because I didn't feel like I'd earned them, in spite of all the time and work I invested. I hope that at these moments, you take time to rest on the peaks and look around, breathe deep in your success and let the sweet air here fortify you for whatever the next bit is.

I don't want to credit this pandemic for anything good, because it seems disrespectful to do so when it has come with so much loss. But, when the question of life or death is constant and it seems like every choice you make has costs that could have incomprehensible consequences, it changes you. There is no doubt that COVID-19 has left an indelible mark on each of us. I wonder how the pandemic has changed you? Kids are a work in progress, and we credit a lot of their development on academic access. With so many interruptions to your education, maybe you've gotten more time to just play or maybe it's given your outstanding parents a wider lens on physical and mental health. It's certainly given you all a lot of time together, and in the background of our Roblox games, you all sound like a mostly happy, chaotic family. Even when Brandon is crying or Sunny is barking. Sometimes it just be like that.

I don't have an answer for that. Might not ever. But I am trying to hold tight to the things that bring me joy. For now, part of that is getting to be someone you look up to. Your admiration makes me a better person. I'm grateful to you and for you.

Love,
Sawyer

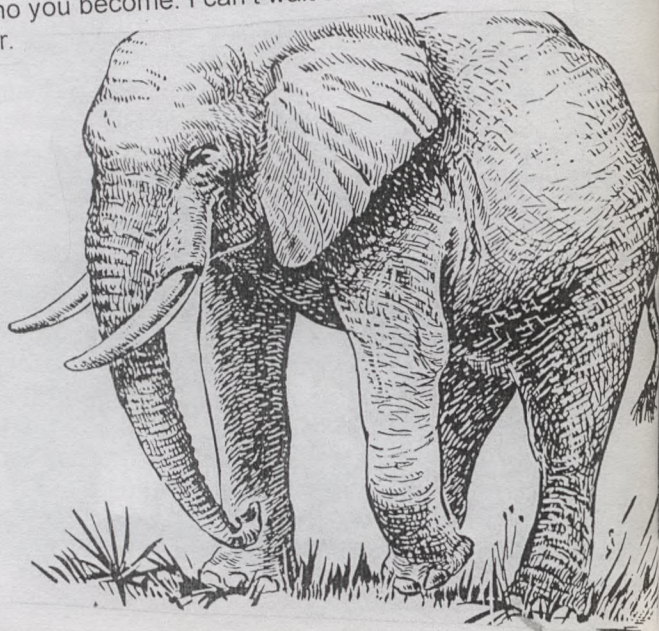




Dear Andrew,
I've been thinking a lot about dudeness. About how when I came out as trans, you were the person in my life with the easiest adjustment period. You truly, at four or five years old, didn't struggle with pronouns or name change stuff. And if you slipped up and used the wrong one, you sort of just apologized and shrugged and continued telling me about what Daniel Tiger was up to. (Side note: did you know his dad was Mr. Rogers, who I loved when I was your age? I'm not sure I ever told you that.)

Your unblinking acceptance has been really helpful as I figure out what kind of guy I want to be. I think that's a thing we have in common. We're both in the process of figuring it out. Maybe everyone else is also figuring it out, all the time too. It's cool to see it happen, though. I'm so proud of the cool, kind, smart little human you are. I can't wait to see who you become. I can't wait to see who I become either.

Love,
Sawyer



Dear Andrew,

I've been thinking about parents a lot. Both yours and mine. I know it can seem like your parents are legit stepping on your freedom. But when your mom tells you she wants you in bed at a certain time, she wants you to be well-rested and ready for school.

She's a good mom. Like, arguably one of the best I've ever known. We have a bit in common, Your mom and I, in the way that we had kind of dodgy parental figures with fairly serious substance abuse problems. We did a lot of growing up when we should have been worried about bikes and Barbies and boy germs.

I think it made her kinder and more empathetic and I think it gave us both fairly big issues with boundaries. Hers got clearer when you were born and she stepped into motherhood. I know it's hard to think of your parents as people, and it's even harder to consider them "cool" people.

But they are, in fact, very cool humans. Because of your mom and Aunt Ryan's friendship, I've gotten to watch your mom go through culinary school to become an impressively talented baker, quit a job that made her miserable, and then grow from a talented reporter to a wildly amazing editor. She's done a lot of really cool things. Wanna know what the coolest thing is?

She had you and your brother and you guys gave her the opportunity to really play for fun sometimes. She laughs harder and (I hope) doubts herself twice as often. I don't doubt her at all. She is steadfast and stalwart. She is one of the best people I've ever met.



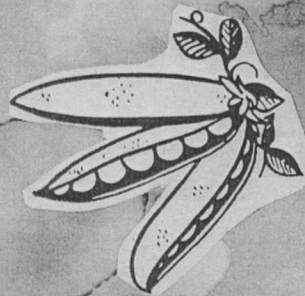
Your dad is also very cool, but it took me a while to see it. When we first met, your parents had only been married for like, five minutes. He had moved from his mom's house into a house he was buying with his wife.

I have only known your dad through the lens of my wife's best friend's husband, which is to say: not well. But after you were born, it seemed like he slipped into the role of "goofy dad," like a tailored coat. He seemed to care less what people thought, and his humanity came more clearly into focus. I think you get your sense of fair play and mischief from your dad. And SO many facial features.

I think it's normal and natural to feel like your parents don't understand you. In a way, they can't, because you're still evolving into who you are. I don't think it's too much of a stretch to say that you're still learning to understand yourself. Identity is an ever-changing concept that maybe we never settle comfortably into.

But there are parents who try and parents who don't. And yours are trying their hardest to make sure you and your bro are as safe and happy as you can be. They're probably the best parents I've ever met and I'm so excited that I get to stand on the sidelines and watch you all figure it out together.

I love you very much.
Your friend,
Sawyer



Dear Andrew,

My brother died when I was a kid and Aunt Ryan didn't have brothers or sisters, so I assumed the role I'd play in the lives of kids I knew was a sort of distant adult figure they saw at birthday parties. Being your uncle is not something I expected, but it's something that I enjoy a lot. Your friendship makes me a better person and you make me laugh and take myself seriously. I am so proud of and grateful for you.

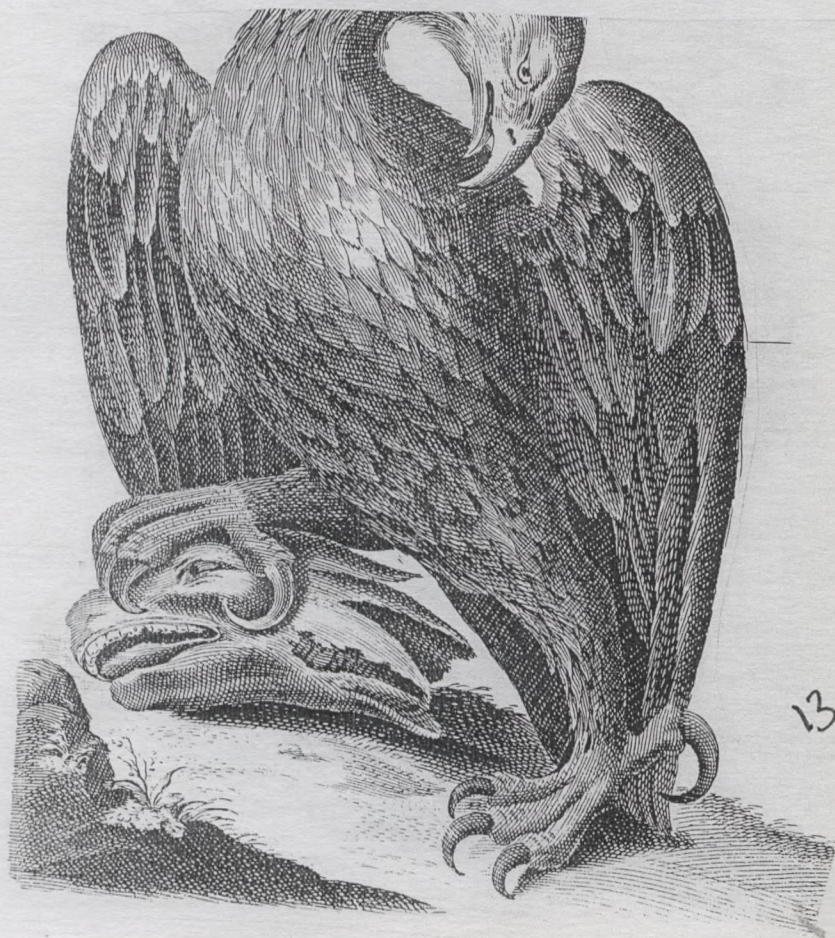


Hey bud.

Today was kind of a perfect day. We switched it up and played pizza chef and it was fun and unexpectedly challenging. You made a pretty successful restaurant—and I focused on being mostly a production-based company.

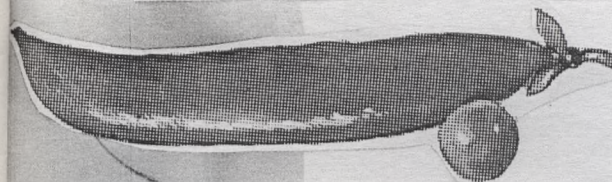
We talked a little bit about money and food and someday we'll talk more about the economy and personal responsibility. But to be honest, I'm still learning a lot of it myself. I hope I learn enough to set a good example. I'm trying really hard to do so.

Love,
Sawyer



THANKS TO:

- Kristen, John, Andrew,
? Brandon.
- Ryan & Oscar
- proofreading / beta
pals.
- you, for your attention



PLEASE:

- don't post this on the
internet.
- sell for a profit.
- quote whatever you'd
like, but plz credit me.
- get in touch if you
wanna: sawyer lovet
@gmail.com
(and @sawyerlovet
on social media.)

Dear Andrew,

One of my favorite things about you is how you change your mind often and easily. I hope you always do, so you can continue to remind me that it's how humans grow and evolve for the better.

I'm so grateful for all the smart stuff you teach me.

Love,
Sawyer

